

Testimony of John Allen
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In support of

**HB 6884 (AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE
TEACHING PROFESSION)**

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. I testify today in support of House Bill 6884-particularly in support of the proposed Teacher Advisory Committee.

In my district, the teacher shortage has been an open topic of conversation amongst our students. While this issue has been highlighted recently in the media, my district has experienced high turnover for the entirety of my time there. Currently I am tied for sixth in seniority in the teaching staff of my school-and this is only my eighth year teaching. In my time in Putnam, I've seen entire departments turned over, some of them more than once. More recently it has been more difficult for us to fill those positions. Both the difficulties in recruitment and retention greatly concerns me as someone who is an advocate for our profession. We need enthusiastic and dynamic professionals to *want* to teach. We need veteran teachers in our schools to stay and mentor our new teachers. As someone who progressed to the finalist level in this year's State Teacher of the Year process, I wouldn't have made it past my first year teaching without the guidance of our veteran teaching staff. We, as a state, need to make a better effort at addressing the causes of the teacher shortage.

Everything we do as teachers is about our students. I truly believe there is no job in the world like teaching. When our students succeed, or when we see them proud of themselves for what they have accomplished in our classes and beyond- that is the ultimate reward for us. In recent times, it is not enough to simply keep our staff. Like we are told on an airplane, "put on your mask before helping others." If teachers who are already stretched thin are not taken care of, and the demands of teachers are not lessened, I worry that they will not be able to best support our students who desperately need it. It is no secret that teachers are working harder now than ever before-whether it is keeping up with the list of post-covid teaching demands, covering for teacher and para shortages, or staying after school to tutor students who are still recovering from disrupted learning, our current state of the profession is just not sustainable. You can reach out to any teacher across the state, and they will tell you this.

HB 6884 is a step in the right direction in addressing some of the reasons for the teacher shortage. Teachers deserve a seat at the table to help bridge the gap between policy and reality. They know and can speak to what is currently happening in their districts. If the Commissioner of Education is able to create a Teacher Advisory Committee, the policy that comes out of the CSDE will be stronger because it included the guidance of real time teachers in its creation. In education, we know that students learn best when they are part of the process of learning-this philosophy should be embraced prior to any policy that concerns teachers.

Recently, I was honored to take part in an educator roundtable with the Commissioner of Education amongst other Connecticut Teacher of the Year, finalists, and semifinalists that would be focused on recruitment, retention, and enhancing the teaching profession. Prior to attending, I reached out to many of my fellow teachers in my district, and asked what they would want me to say. Everyone that I spoke to was truly excited to have their voice heard by the Commissioner. After meeting with my colleagues, I had pages of notes to bring with me. The hour and a half roundtable discussion was direct and honest, but solution oriented. In speaking to many of the participants in the roundtable, there was a genuine consensus of empowerment around being asked to contribute. We were inspired by the talent in the room- these were all experts in their own way, with a vast wealth of experience teaching the children of Connecticut. We felt that our voices were heard, knowing that we had advocated for the kinds of positive outcomes needed in Connecticut.

The possibility of one of these roundtables to be a consistent part of how education policy is shaped is a big deal to those of us in the teaching profession. We focus on being experts in the field of education, and we would bring with us a depth of experience and knowledge. Please consider voting in support of HB 6884.